

Attempted Robbery Of An Elderly Shopkeeper

*Two 15 year old boys attempted to rob a
local corner shop, threatening and frightening
the elderly shopkeeper*

Naseem and Ryan had become friends through attending the same school. The pair had discussed ways of making money after Ryan had told Naseem of his bleak home situation. His father had been imprisoned after trying to kill his mother and the family home was having to be sold. Ryan was acutely aware of his mother's difficult financial situation and felt responsible for her. In his misguided attempt to 'help', the two boys hatched a plan to rob a shop. Although initially Naseem was reluctant to become involved he eventually agreed to assist his friend.

The Offence

One summer's evening, 15 year old Naseem and Ryan entered a local corner store after ensuring that there were no other customers present. They spent some time looking around before they plucking up the courage to approach the elderly shopkeeper Mr Banerjee. They had gone in to the shop with the intention of robbing the shopkeeper and had gone equipped to do so. Naseem had a knife hidden up his sleeve and Ryan had an imitation gun hidden down the front of his trousers. They approached the counter and Naseem demanded that Mr Banerjee hand over the contents of the till, holding the knife in his left hand as he did so. Mr Banerjee refused their request and picked up the telephone to call the police. At this both boys ran out of the shop empty handed. They were arrested shortly afterwards for attempted robbery after being caught in a nearby underpass where they were changing into different clothing. The knife and clothing were found in a rucksack they had with them. The shopkeeper was extremely shocked after the incident and described feeling frightened and concerned for his safety.

The Decision to Meet

Prior to the boys being sentenced by the court, a Police Officer who was attached to the Youth Offending Team and experienced in Restorative Conferencing visited Mr Banerjee at his home. The possibility of Direct Reparation between Mr Banerjee and the two youths was explored and discussed. Mr Banerjee stated that he would be more than happy to participate in a Restorative Conference and would welcome the chance to hear from the boys themselves the reasons for their actions. Neither of the youths had ever offended before and the offence was therefore was totally out of character for both of them. Their respective families were extremely distressed when they learned of their sons' behaviour. Both youths expressed their shame and remorse for their actions and vowed never to offend again. Naseem and Ryan also said they would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the victim. Because the victim had voluntarily expressed a desire to meet with the two young men concerned and they themselves had said that they wanted to apologise to him in person, it was written

into the Pre-Sentence Report that this would happen. As a result, the court made it a requirement of the Supervision Order. All parties were subsequently contacted again and the Restorative Conferencing process explained in detail. A venue was booked for the conference to take place in neutral surroundings 4 days before Christmas. Both Ryan and Naseem expressed the wish to face Mr Banerjee alone without either of their parents being present, but were naturally nervous about how the process would evolve.

The meeting

The boys were already seated when Mr Banerjee walked in. He immediately shook their hands, which clearly put them at ease. The Youth Offending Team Police Officer then ran the conference in a structured manner, allowing each person the time and space to talk about what had happened. Mr Banerjee explained to the boys about how their actions had affected him and the boys expressed their remorse at the distress they had caused. At the conclusion of the conference Mr Banerjee told the boys how impressed he had been by their willingness to meet him. He invited both the boys to visit him in the shop with their Mothers to “have a cup of tea with him”. Before leaving he handed each boy a £10 note and wished them a very “Happy Christmas!” Both Naseem and Ryan thanked Mr Banerjee profusely and appeared genuinely moved by his generosity. Ryan beamed and said “at least I’ll be able to buy my mum a Christmas present now”. This Restorative Conference was one of the most moving and successful that the facilitator had ever witnessed. The process taught Ryan and Naseem so much about the kindness and forgiveness of the victim even though they had offended against him. Through the process they both gained a valuable insight in to the victim’s perspective.